Washington State Auditor's Office
Troy Kelley
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Performance Audit

Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) in Washington

A longitudinal study of ALE programs and student outcomes

Audit update issued: February 23, 2015

The State Auditor's Office is conducting a long-term study of educational outcomes for students enrolled in Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs. To prepare for this study, we performed some limited preliminary reviews of student data.

We found that ALE students differ from traditional students in a number of characteristics including race and ethnic makeup, disability status, participation in specific programs and services, instances of homelessness, and home schooling with part-time attendance. Any comparison of ALE and traditional student academic outcomes will need to control for these differences. Our future analyses will match ALE students with comparable students receiving traditional education.

Audit schedule

- We will publish our first full report in late 2015. It will evaluate ALE students statewide and compare their outcomes from the 2013-14 school year to those of a matched set of students receiving only traditional instruction.
- The second report, planned for late 2016, will follow these matched student cohorts through the 2014-15 school year.
- The third and final report, planned for late 2018, will follow these students through the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years.

Audit Number: 1013676

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Introduction

Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs offer school districts greater flexibility in educating Washington's diverse student population by serving students outside traditional classroom settings. After a slight dip in enrollment during the Great Recession, enrollments in ALE options are again on the rise. Across Washington, they served more than 32,000 students in the 2013-14 school year, at an estimated annual cost of $148 million. Because the popularity and prevalence of ALE programs are likely to increase, the state is evaluating how students in ALE models perform academically compared to those receiving traditional schooling.

Legislative concerns about ALE program results prompt a longitudinal performance audit

In 2013, the Legislature approved significant changes to the rules governing ALE programs that receive state funding. Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 5946 was intended to encourage greater accountability and transparency in ALE programs statewide. Sec. 502, (4c) states that the State Auditor's Office must, "[b]eginning in the 2013-14 school year and continuing through the 2016-17 school year [conduct a] biennial measure of student outcomes…" of ALE.

State Auditor's Office begins work on the performance audit

The graphic on page 4 illustrates the timeline of our audit plan, as well as key dates and changes within the ALE system.

This status update includes information about the recent evolution of ALE, our preliminary analysis of student characteristics, a discussion of issues we identified that may affect the upcoming performance evaluations, and the next steps for the audit.

In the course of our audit, we will be working with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Education Research Data Center (ERDC) within the Office of Financial Management, and with selected public school districts and individual ALE programs.

Preliminary analysis performed on a sample population of students, programs

To conduct our preliminary studies for the audit, we examined past and current ALE program definitions, and student enrollment data drawn from a sample population obtained from rosters provided by 80 school districts across the state. The analyses are based on 2012-13 school year data, the most recent complete data available at the time of our request. **Appendix A** discusses our sample and how we obtained it.

We would like to thank the school districts that voluntarily supplied 2012-13 school year rosters for their ALE students for our preliminary study. These districts are acknowledged in Appendix A.

ALE programs are increasingly popular across Washington

more than 32,000 or 3%

of the state's 1 million-plus students take part in an ALE program or course (2013-14 school year)

To view the financial audits conducted by the State Auditor's Office as part of this series, please visit our website at:

www.sao.wa.gov/local/Pages/SchoolsProgram

ALE performance audit timeline 2012-2018

This table shows the timetable of the longitudinal ALE study being conducted by the State Auditor's Office Performance Audit division. It illustrates recent changes to ALE data definitions and data reporting, the interval between data availability and analysis, and our publication schedule. The current report is highlighted in pink in the last column.

ALE data changes	2013-14 ALE student cohorts		School year	Season	Calendar year	Audit activities and publications
ALE tracked by program type (Online/Digital, Contract-based, Parent Partnership), not by individual student.			2012-13	F		
				W	2013	Legislature passes ESSB 5946: • Requires greater accountability and transparency • Redefines ALE from program types to course types • Mandates audit of ALE student outcomes from 2013-14 through 2016-17
				S		Audit planning.
ALE student coursework flagged as "yes/no." ALE course type not yet identified.	*enter grade 9*	*enter grade 12*	2013-14	F		Request rosters of 2012-13 ALE students from subset of school districts.
				W	2014	Obtain rosters of 2012-13 ALE students subset. Obtain 2012-13 student data for school districts that provided ALE rosters.
		2014 grads		S		Analyze data on the subset of 2012-13 ALE students.
ALE student coursework tracked by course type (Online, Site-based, Remote).	*enter grade 10*		2014-15	F		
				W	2015	**Publish Status Update. Issues / limitations and preliminary review of academic data from subset of 2012-13 ALE students.** Data from 2013-14 academic year is available .
		1 year post HS		S		Define 2013-14 ALE cohorts and match to traditional instruction students. Visit ALE programs with high academic outcomes. Analyze data on 2013-14 ALE students and matched traditional cohort.
	enter grade 11		2015-16	F		**Publish Audit Report 1**. 2013-14 ALE vs. traditional.
				W	2016	Data from 2014-15 academic year is available. Obtain post high school data on 2014 grads.
		2 years post HS		S		Visit to ALE programs with high student academic growth. Focus groups/surveys with ALE students and families. Analyze data on 2014-15 ALE students and follow 2013-14 cohorts.
	enter grade 12		2016-17	F		**Publish Audit Report 2.** First follow-up of 2013-14 cohorts.
				W	2017	Data from 2015-16 academic year is available. Obtain post high school data on 2014 grads.
	2017 grads	*3 years post HS*		S		Analyze data on 2015-16 ALE students and follow 2013-14 cohorts.
				F		**Publish Status Update.** Second follow-up of 2013-14 cohorts.
				W	2018	Data from 2016-17 academic year is available. Obtain post high school data on 2014 grads.
		End of performance audit period		S		Analyze data on 2015-16 ALE students and follow 2013-14 cohorts.
				F		**Publish Audit Report 3.** Third follow-up and final report.

Preliminary Review of ALE Programs and Data

ALE has undergone significant changes since 2013

ALE programs provide an individualized course of study for K-12 age children without requiring students to meet the in-class seat-time requirements for traditional instruction. ALE courses may include online courses or courses in which students receive a limited amount of in-person instructional contact outside the traditional classroom. In addition to offering all students alternative learning opportunities and serving students who may not thrive in traditional settings, ALE programs allow school districts to claim students enrolled in nontraditional programs for the purposes of state funding.

ALE "program types" became "course types" in the 2013-14 school year

The same bill that authorized our Office to conduct financial and student outcome audits also changed the way ALE programs were defined in the 2013-14 school year and onwards. Previously, ALE programs were defined by "program types:" Online/Digital learning, Contract-based, and Parent Partnership. These definitions were problematic because they were very general and districts applied them inconsistently, often to describe very different program styles.

The bill redefined ALE in statute as three "course types" – Online, Site-based, and Remote – rather than as program types. **Appendix B** discusses the changes in detail, including our efforts to compare the old and new definitions.

There is some alignment between the programs formerly classified as Online/Digital and the new Online course type, but the relationship is not one-to-one. The former Contract-Based and Parent Partnership programs are more diverse in the types of course instruction that they offer.

About the student data in this status update report

Slightly more than 1 million students were enrolled in Washington school districts in October 2012, according to OSPI's October 1, 2012, State Level report. We received ALE enrollment information directly from districts, because – for this preliminary evaluation – neither ALE courses nor ALE course type data were available from OSPI's statewide K-12 database, the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS). **Exhibit 1** shows a summary of the data received, which represents our sample.

Exhibit 1: Sample size compared to overall student population

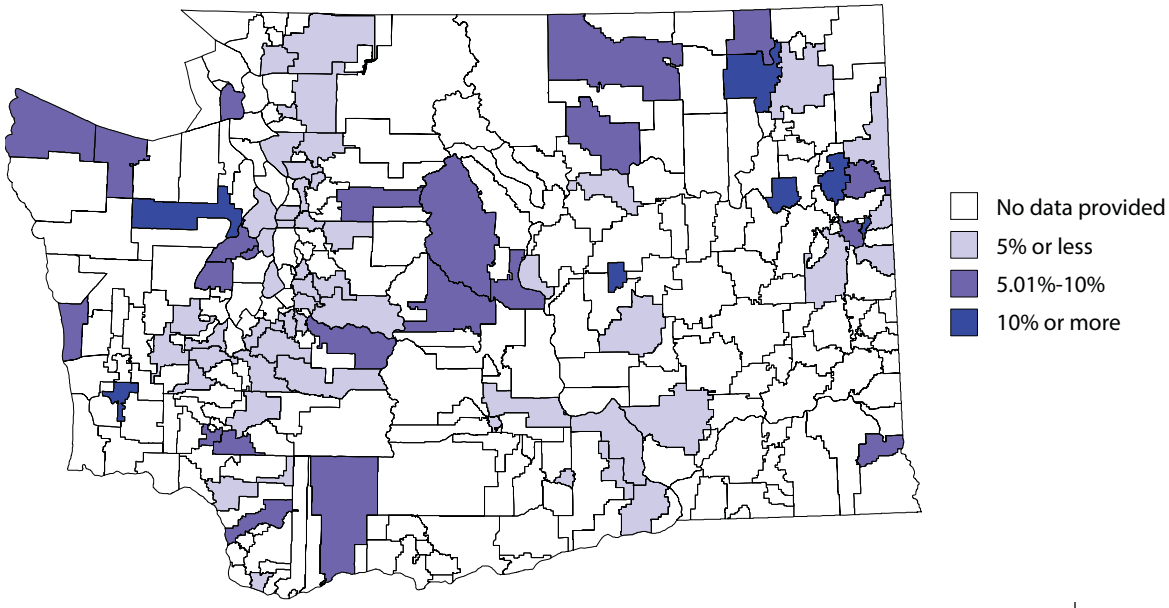
(2012-13 school year)

Totals statewide	Our sample set	Giving us...
1 million students	575,000	57% of all students
in 295 districts	80	27% of all districts
34,000 ALE students	16,055	47% of all ALE students
in 363 ALE programs	118	33% of all ALE programs

A note about sample representativeness

Although we only have data that represents a portion of students enrolled in the public school system, we believe that our data is representative of students statewide. The makeup of our sample population is similar to that of students statewide across a few key characteristics, including grade level distribution, gender and race. The map in **Exhibit 2** shows that our sample includes districts from all across the state, including small, medium and large ALE programs. (View it at a larger scale in Appendix A.)

Exhibit 2: Map of Washington school districts data and proportions of ALE students



The ALE rosters we received from the school districts mainly included students at the secondary school level. ALE instruction is more common in larger school districts and at the upper grades, but our sample under-represents students receiving ALE instruction at the elementary school level. We also were less likely to receive rosters from smaller school districts. This may be because few small school districts offer ALE instruction; additionally rosters were requested as part of ALE program financial audits, which are only performed on programs with 10 or more student full-time equivalents (FTEs). Our plan for the upcoming audit is to obtain statewide-level data in order to explore differences between ALE offerings targeting primary school students and those targeting secondary school students.

ALE and traditional student characteristics differ: Further analysis is necessary to draw conclusions about those differences

As **Exhibit 3** shows, we discovered some differences between ALE students and students receiving traditional education. (More detailed information about students enrolled in ALE programs in our sample can be found in **Appendix C**.)

Overall, these differences indicate that ALE students may be a unique population of students. For this reason, further evaluation of ALE instruction will focus on comparing ALE students with a matched group of similar students receiving traditional instruction, rather than comparing ALE students to the overall statewide population of students.

Exhibit 3: We found the ALE students in our sample are:

- slightly more likely to be female than male
- less likely to belong to a racial or ethnic minority group
- less likely to receive gifted, special education, or Limited English Proficiency services
- less likely to have an identified disability
- more likely to be homeless
- more likely to be a part-time student who is also homeschooled
- more likely to be high school students

ALE and traditional student academic outcomes also differ: Further analysis is necessary to determine the cause of these differences

We also found differences in academic outcomes for ALE students in our sample compared to students who received only traditional instruction (listed in **Exhibit 4**). Perhaps the most notable difference between the two is the significantly higher drop-out rate of ALE students: nearly 30 percent of all high-school dropouts in our 2012-13 sample were ALE students.

At this point in our analysis, these differences in academic outcomes for this limited sample cannot be attributed to ALE program performance. They may be due to differences in the types of students who enroll in ALE programs, rather than the instructional model. Further evaluation of ALE instruction will follow students longitudinally to compare academic outcomes for ALE students relative to similar students (individual characteristics as well as academic history) who received traditional instruction. Following a comparison group over time will allow us to better isolate the effects of ALE instruction on student outcomes.

Exhibit 4: Academic outcomes for ALE students in our sample show that they are:

- more likely to be one or more grade levels behind their peers
- less likely to have taken courses that predict college enrollment
- less likely to be on track for the necessary number of credits their district requires for graduation
- less likely to meet standards on almost all standardized tests
- more likely to have slightly lower grade point averages
- less likely to graduate on time
- much more likely to drop out of school

Data Issues Identified

Issues identified in this phase of work will pose challenges for future analyses

As we explored the variety of ALE programs available within our state and reviewed academic data for the 2012-13 school year, we identified several issues that complicate the measurement of outcomes from ALE instruction in the upcoming audit. This section of the report outlines five of our most notable concerns.

1. ALE course types will not be available in CEDARS database until half-way through our study

The limited data available will have an impact on the analyses we will be able to perform early in our investigation.

ALE courses were not tracked by student in any data systems available on a statewide basis prior to the 2013-14 school year. Instead, ALE programs self-reported the students enrolled in any one of the three ALE course types for this status update. The programs were not asked to indicate the type of ALE instruction any individual student was taking or the proportion of a student's course load that was ALE.

Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, OSPI required districts to identify ALE courses as such, but the courses are not identified by course type (Online, Remote, or Site-based).

This will allow us to begin to analyze the impact of ALE course load on student outcomes. However, we will still be unable to evaluate the differential impacts of ALE programs by course type until data becomes available. By this time, we will be about half-way through our investigation (see the timeline on page 4).

Changing definitions may make course type information unreliable

Even by the time we are halfway through our study, any conclusions about ALE instruction by course type will be tentative. New definitions for ALE course types (Online, Remote, and Site-based) are based on the proportion of student time spent online or physically with a teacher, rather than the program type districts have been accustomed to. As a result, this information may be initially unreliable given the recent definition change, complexity of the definition, and potentially different interpretations or understanding by school employees tasked with entering data into the state data system.

2. Program names are inconsistent

For this status update, we matched program names as reported on district-supplied student rosters to program names on reports provided to OSPI. This was a far-from-straightforward process because names did not always match up, but it did give a close approximation for most students in our sample.

OSPI officials told us that ALE program names are not standardized. Many programs are housed within a school and the names of those programs may vary by the individual entering the data. Other programs take the name of the school itself or the larger company that manages the program. Additionally, not all ALE programs are considered "stand-alone" schools; other students may be receiving traditional instruction within the same school.

Five key issues for this audit:

1. Availability of course type data in CEDARS
2. Inconsistency in program names
3. Our ability to match OSPI's method of measuring dropout and graduation rates
4. The number of variables in ALE enrollment that can affect student outcomes
5. The diversity of ALE instruction between and within school districts

Because there is no unique identifier for an ALE program, it is difficult to identify students participating in the same ALE program within the same year, or even the same student participating in the same ALE program from year to year.

3. Graduation and dropout rates for audit study cohorts will not be consistent with OSPI's measures

OSPI measures graduation and dropout rates using an "adjusted cohort rate." Under this method, OSPI places students in a cohort when they enter 9th grade for the first time and tracks those students over time. The resulting measure shows the proportion of students that entered school at the same time and graduated in four or five years, or dropped out.

In this status report, because we did not have historical information about when a student entered 9th grade for the first time, we simply tested whether students graduated in the year they were expected to graduate.

When we obtain records for students during the upcoming audit, we will define a first-time 9th grade cohort as of the 2013-14 school year. However, since this audit will only follow these students for four school years, we will be unable to report graduation and drop out statistics in a manner consistent with OSPI's method for this particular cohort. We will be able to calculate adjusted four-year cohort rates during the last year of the audit, but will be unable to report an adjusted cohort five-year graduation or dropout rate within the audit time frame.

4. The number of variables in ALE program enrollment can affect student academic outcomes

An individual student can be enrolled in:

- multiple schools
- multiple ALE programs
- multiple course types (Online, Site-based, Remote)
- ALE courses and traditional instruction courses simultaneously

All these variables can affect ALE student outcomes.

Our audit methodology will account for these differences and weigh student outcomes against the proportion of time spent in ALE and the proportion of time spent in different types of ALE courses. However, two lags in data reporting will limit our ability to track student enrollment to recent participation in ALE courses. (See the sidebar at right.) While we will be able to tell what portion of a student's recent course work has been under an ALE model versus a traditional model, we have no way to tell what type of instruction students received throughout the full range of their academic experience.

For example, it is reasonable to expect that the effect of ALE instruction will be stronger if a student received this form of schooling since kindergarten than if the student took one ALE course as a senior to meet graduation requirements. Without historical ALE enrollment information, we will not be able to clearly distinguish the students who have received almost all of their education through ALE from students who have only recently tried this type of instruction.

Two important lags in data affect our ability to assess long-term ALE impact on student achievement:

1. ***Districts were not required to report individual student ALE enrollment to OSPI until the 2013-14 school year.*** At that time, individual courses began to be identified as ALE funded or not-ALE funded.
2. ***Districts were not required to identify the ALE course type until the 2014-15 school year.*** We have no historical information on how long a student has been receiving ALE instruction, or under which instructional model, prior to the 2014-15 school year.

Additionally, OSPI does not collect academic history or concurrent course information for subjects taught outside the purview of the public school system. It will be difficult to identify the impact of ALE instruction for part-time enrolled students, such as those who are also homeschooled or enrolled in a private school, since so little is known about their academic experience beyond the limited instruction they receive through public schools.

Part-time students may opt out of state-required assessments or be assessed only on those subject areas addressed in their learning plan for the public school. Therefore, limited information will be available to compare the performance of part-time students to full-time students.

5. ALE is a diverse category of instruction, within and between school districts

To gain a better understanding of ALE programs, we looked at ALE program descriptions obtained from several district websites. There were many differences between the handful of programs we viewed:

- Some programs use commercially available curricula (there are several companies for districts to select from), while others develop their own curricula internally.
- Some programs are housed in standalone buildings, while others are located on the same campus as traditional schools or are even integrated within the same setting.
- The instructional approaches between the ALE course types may overlap. For example, a Remote or On-site course may include some component of internet-delivered instruction but not meet the formal definition of an Online course in statute.
- Some programs specifically reach out to a particular type of student (for example, families who wish to educate their child at home, teen parents, or youth at risk of dropping out), while others may serve a broad array of students with various backgrounds and experiences.

When there is high variability in the topic to be studied, it can be difficult to identify statistically significant differences between groups because variability within a single group overshadows variability across the groups.

Therefore, we expect that our investigation will underestimate the actual impact of ALE instruction on student achievement. Some impacts of the ALE instructional model may be missed, and any identified statistically significant differences are likely to be stronger than they appear, based on our analysis of the data.

What can we determine from this audit?

Program outcomes, not student outcomes

Although the legislation asks for an evaluation of student outcomes, our audit technically will focus on outcomes from programs that provide ALE instruction rather than student-specific outcomes. The impact of ALE education on a particular student is difficult to determine, since many factors influence an individual's performance, such as:

- The student's aptitude and experiences beyond the ALE curriculum
- Differences between schools in the curriculum they select and experience they have teaching under an ALE model
- The proportion of education that a student has received under ALE can be very small relative to the amount of education he/she received in a traditional classroom environment.

Unfortunately, data addressing these and other characteristics is not readily available or easily obtainable.

Outcomes within ALE course categories, not specific programs

We will not evaluate outcomes from specific ALE programs in our upcoming audit, but rather outcomes from ALE programs in general. Measures of instructional quality, teacher experience and student aptitude are neither consistent nor centrally available, and few programs employ identical curricula. At best, we will be able to identify and compare outcomes from ALE course type categories.

Short-term impact, not long-term impact

The time span for the audit will follow individual students for only four years. This is a relatively short period to assess long-term outcomes from ALE instruction.

Students who are 9th-graders in school year 2013-14 will be seniors in school year 2016-17, the last year of our data capture, and will not yet have entered college or started their post-high school career. Students who are 12th-graders in school year 2013-14 will not yet have graduated from a four-year college; if they did not attend college, they will be, at most, only three years into their post-high school career. Within the audit's four-year framework we will not be able to assess the long-term effects of ALE instruction, such as the impact on future earnings, career advancement or pursuit of graduate-level education.

What are our next steps?

Data for future analyses will include all students enrolled in public school systems statewide, with information about all students enrolled in ALE by course. In addition to periodic updates as our audit progresses, we plan to publish three reports.

Report #1: Identification of cohorts and ALE outcomes for the 2013-14 school year

For this reporting cycle, we will analyze comprehensive statewide data and identify particular students' coursework as ALE-funded or not ALE. We will compare students receiving ALE instruction to similar students who receive traditional instruction only. This phase of the performance audit will also include site visits to a variety of ALE programs whose students tend to have the highest academic outcomes. The first report will:

- Provide a more precise description of the students enrolled in ALE programs
- Compare academic outcomes for ALE and traditionally schooled students at various grade levels using a statistically valid comparison group
- Identify the range of variability across ALE programs, including characteristics of high-performing programs

Report #2: ALE outcomes for the 2014-15 school year

During this reporting cycle, we will follow the 2013-14 cohorts through the 2014-15 school year. The second report will:

- Determine how many ALE students continue on with ALE instruction through a second school year
- Describe ALE students by the course type used for instruction
- Explore differences in outcomes by student characteristics (that is, are there types of ALE students who perform better than others? Do outcomes differ based on whether a student is enrolled full-time or part-time in ALE instruction? Does the type of course taken via ALE instruction impact statewide testing results?)

Report #3: ALE outcomes for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years

For this reporting cycle, we will follow the 2013-14 cohorts through the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years. The third and final report will:

- Analyze differences in outcomes for ALE students by course type
- Analyze differences in outcomes for ALE students based on the proportion of coursework received under the ALE format
- Follow the progress of ALE students over time (from the 2013-14 school year through the 2016-17 school year)

The Audit Timeline on page 4 includes projected publication seasons for our status updates and reports.

Appendix A: Districts Contributing Data to the Preliminary Study

Obtaining rosters

The State Auditor's Office School Programs team regularly performs financial and accountability audits of Washington's public school districts. During the course of their audits, the School Programs team requested rosters from individual school districts for students who were enrolled in ALE programs or coursework. School districts were not required to provide these rosters, though 80 school districts responded to the request. The map in **Figure 1** shows the districts that contributed data; they are listed, grouped by size, in **Figure 2** on the following page.

Obtaining student data

We requested data for the 2012-13 school year through the Education Research Data Center (ERDC) of the Office of Financial Management (OFM) for all students in the districts that responded to our roster data request. This included ALE students and all other students enrolled in each district. This data is based largely on information stored in the CEDARS database. ERDC coordinated with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to provide the requested data. The ERDC de-identified the data and assigned a unique research identifier for each student.

How CEDARS data informs the audit work

The Comprehensive Educational Data and Research System (CEDARS) is a longitudinal data warehouse of individual course, student, and teacher data provided by local school districts to the State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Student data includes demographics, enrollment information, schedules, grades, and program participation.

Figure 1: Map of Washington school districts data and proportions of ALE students

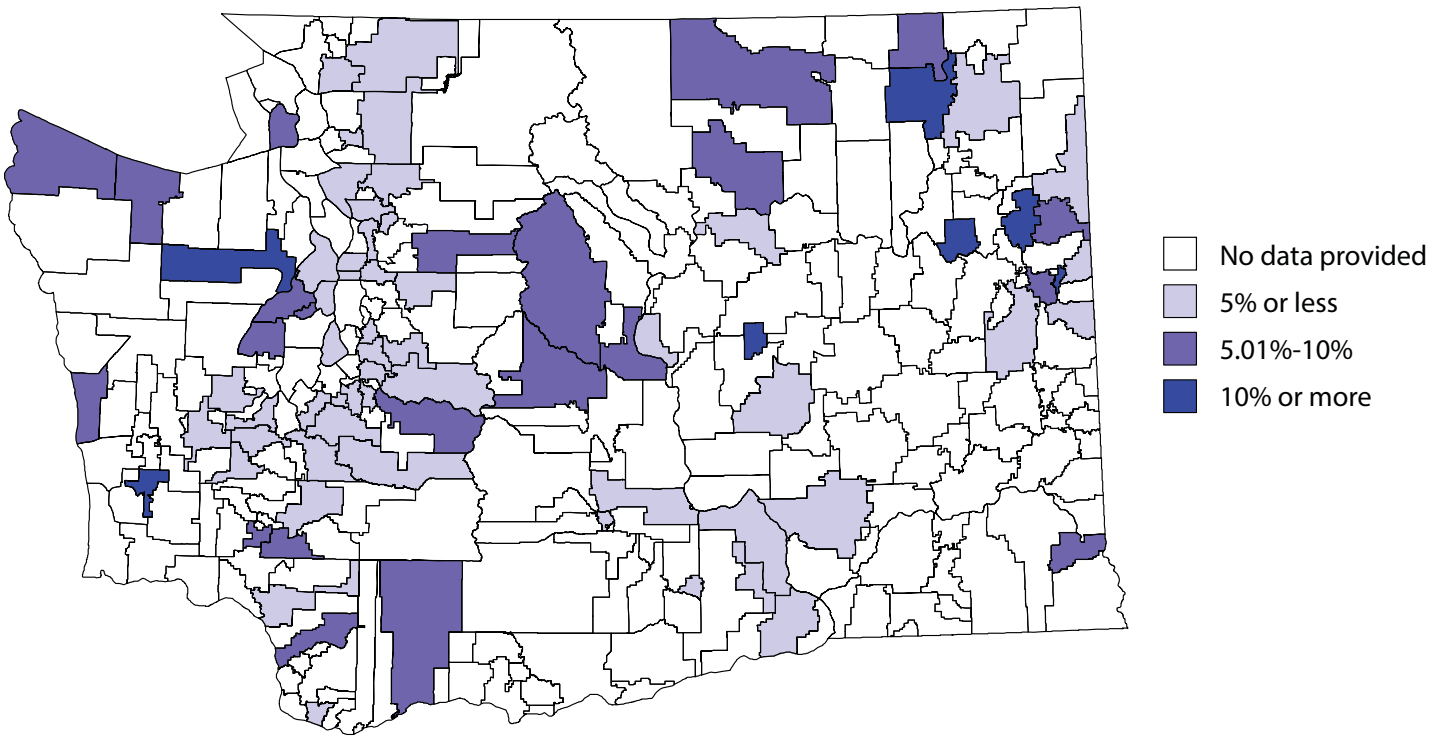


Figure 2: Districts that contributed data to the preliminary study

Small districts (5,000 or fewer students)		
Bainbridge Island School District	Kettle Falls School District	Rochester School District
Bridgeport School District	Kiona-Benton City School District	Sedro-Woolley School District
Cape Flattery School District	Lopez School District	Selah School District
Cascade School District	Mount Baker School District	Shelton School District
Cheney School District	Newport School District	Soap Lake School District
Clarkston School District	North Beach School District	Stevenson-Carson School District
Cle Elum-Roslyn School District	North Franklin School District	Sultan School District
Colville School District	North Mason School District	Toledo School District
Crescent School District	Okanogan School District	Tonasket School District
Deer Park School District	Onalaska School District	Vashon Island School District
Eatonville School District	Orient School District	Wellpinit School District
Elma School District	Quilcene School District	West Valley School District (Spokane)
Enumclaw School District	Raymond School District	White River School District
Freeman School District	Riverside School District	Winlock School District
Grandview School District	Riverview School District	Woodland School District
Medium districts (5,001 to 10,000 students)		
Arlington School District	Lake Stevens School District	Sumner School District
Bremerton School District	Moses Lake School District	Tahoma School District
East Valley School District (Spokane)	Mount Vernon School District	Tumwater School District
Eastmont School District	North Kitsap School District	Wenatchee School District
Franklin Pierce School District	Shoreline School District	Yelm School District
Kelso School District	Stanwood-Camano School District	
Large districts (10,001 to 25,000 students)		
Auburn School District	Edmonds School District	Olympia School District
Bellingham School District	Everett School District	Puyallup School District
Bethel School District	Kennewick School District	Renton School District
Central Kitsap School District	Marysville School District	Richland School District
Clover Park School District	Northshore School District	Yakima School District
Very large districts (more than 25,000 students)		
Evergreen School District (Clark)	Kent School District	Spokane School District

Appendix B: ALE Program Types Become Course Types

Classifications of ALE programs

Before the 2013-14 school year, ALE was defined by three broad categories based on program types.

- **Online/Digital Learning:** Instructor-led coursework through online lessons and tools. Online delivery was considered ALE only when the student was engaged in learning outside the school building and when a school district claimed it toward the student Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for basic education apportionment.
- **Parent Partnership:** These programs required significant participation by the student's parent or guardian as the primary instructor and in the design and implementation of the student's learning experience. Unlike homeschooling, Parent Partnership programs were subject to public school district oversight and rules, including curriculum approval and testing.
- **Contract-Based Learning:** A learning contract or plan between the teacher and the student, usually in high school grades. Many contract-based programs offered flexibly structured programs for gifted students; students requiring remedial academic work or credit retrieval; students not succeeding in a general education format due to behavioral or other issues; or students transitioning back to public school from drug rehabilitation, juvenile detention or hospitals.

After 2013: ALE defined as course types

The Legislature's revised "course type" definitions, shown in the panel to the right, do not neatly align with the previous "program type" definitions. As a result, we asked OSPI to clarify the similarities and differences.

Program types versus course types

OSPI gave us a spreadsheet combining several survey reports from individual school districts. We analyzed the spreadsheet data to determine how the former program classifications compare to the new course type classifications. For the most part, programs report that their ALE FTEs have shifted in this manner:

- Online/Digital Learning programs are now primarily offering the **Online** course type
- Contract-Based programs are primarily offering **Site-based** courses, though there is variability with several programs offering **Online** or **Remote** courses
- Parent Partnership programs are primarily offering either **Site-based or Remote** courses

Overall, Online and Site-based courses account for approximately equal proportions of ALE instruction, with Remote courses provided by about half as many ALE programs.

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 5946
Strengthening student educational outcomes *(pdf, 182 kb)*

"(A) "Online course" means an alternative learning experience course that has the same meaning as provided in RCW 28A.250.010 (more than 50 percent of the course content is delivered electronically; more than 50 percent of the content is delivered from a remote location; a certificated teacher is primarily responsible for a student's instructional interaction and a student has access to the teacher synchronously, asynchronously, or both).

(B) "Remote course" means an alternative learning experience course or course work that is not an online course where the student has in-person instructional contact time for less than twenty percent of the total weekly time for the course.

(C) "Site-based course" means an alternative learning experience course or course work that is not an online course where the student has in-person instructional contact time for at least twenty percent of the total weekly time for the course."

We did not analyze student characteristics or program outcomes by the former ALE program definitions in this status update because they were not in use during the timeframe for our audit. However, we did attempt to classify programs in our sample by the current course type definitions, as defined in ESSB 5946, based on the FTEs reported to OSPI (see **Figure 3**). This provides our best guess of the type of instruction an individual student received.

Figure 3: ALE programs and students by course type in our sample

Preliminary data based on a limited sample of 2012-2013 school year

	Number of programs in sample	Percent of programs in sample	Number of students in sample	Percent of students in sample
Online	36	30%	5,884	37%
Remote	15	13%	1,584	10%
Site-based	42	35%	5,896	37%
Mixed	23	19%	2,369	15%
Unknown*	3	3%	322	2%

**"Unknown" are programs we could not identify in OSPI's spreadsheet.*

We matched the programs in our sample to the data provided by OSPI based on program names. Many programs offer more than one course type, so we defined programs by the course type reported for most of its student FTEs. We defined programs that reported 75 percent or greater FTE for a single type as that single type. We defined a program reporting multiple course types with less than 75 percent in any category, as a "mixed" type.

Programs varied in the primary course type they offer. For programs in our sample, one in five could not clearly be classified as a single type of instruction. Because so many programs could not readily be distinguished by a single course type, we did not further analyze 2012-13 school year data by the new course type classifications. Individual courses will be identified in OSPI's CEDARS data beginning with the 2014-15 school year. It will then be possible to determine the specific type of instruction a particular student received.

Appendix C: ALE Student Characteristics and Program Outcomes in the Sample Population

General demographics

Figures 4, 5 and **6** show that, overall, our sample of traditionally educated students closely mirrors the characteristics of public school students statewide. ALE students, however are:

- slightly more likely to be female
- less likely to be enrolled in special programs such as special education, limited English proficiency, or gifted programs
- more likely to be homeschooled and attending public school part-time
- less likely to identify themselves as having a disability
- more likely to be homeless
- less racially and ethnically diverse than their non-ALE counterparts
- more likely to be high school students in the upper grades

Figure 4: Student characteristics, by greatest disparity between ALE and traditional students

Preliminary data based on a limited sample of 2012-2013 school year

Student characteristic	ALE	Traditional	Statewide
Non-white or Hispanic	29%	40%	41%
Special education	8%	15%	13%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP) program	2%	8%	9%
Disability[1]	9%	15%	14%
Female	53%	48%	48%
Homeless[2]	6%	2%	2%
Gifted[3]	2%	5%	6%
Free/reduced lunch	52%	50%	46%
Part-time also homeschooled[4]	3%	<1%	<1%
Section 504	3%	2%	2%
Part-time also private school[5]	<1%	<1%	<1%

Data source: Statewide data from Washington State Report Card for 2012-13 school year: Washington State Report Card. Additional data sources include:

1 *Disability* statewide data provided by OSPI.

2 *Homeless* statewide data from the 2012-13 Homeless Children and Youth Data Report, divided by total enrollment.

3 *Gifted* statewide data from the 2012-13 HCP Student Enrollment Report

4 *Part-time also homeschooled* statewide data from the 2012-13 Home-Based Instruction Annual Report.

5 *Part-time also private school* statewide data provided by OSPI.

Figure 5: Federal ethnicity and race classifications

Preliminary data based on a limited sample of 2012-2013 school year

Ethnicity/Race	ALE	Traditional	Statewide
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3%	2%	2%
Asian	2%	6%	7%
Black/African American	3%	4%	5%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	14%	20%	20%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	<1%	1%	1%
Two or more races	7%	7%	6%
White	71%	60%	59%

Figure 6: Grade level

Preliminary data based on a limited sample of 2012-2013 school year

Grade level	Sample not ALE	Sample ALE	Statewide	Statewide ALE
Pre-Kindergarten	3%	<1%	1%	
K (full-day)	3%	<1%	4%	2%
K (half-day)	5%	<1%	4%	
1	8%	<1%	8%	4%
2	7%	<1%	8%	5%
3	7%	<1%	8%	5%
4	7%	<1%	7%	5%
5	7%	<1%	7%	5%
6	7%	4%	8%	6%
7	7%	5%	8%	6%
8	7%	6%	8%	7%
9	8%	12%	8%	9%
10	8%	15%	8%	12%
11	8%	22%	8%	13%
12	8%	35%	8%	20%

Academic achievement

On average, ALE students tend to be slightly behind their traditionally educated counterparts and they tend to perform less well academically. ALE students are also much more likely to drop out of school than students who receive traditional instruction only. **Figure 7** compares eight key indicators.

Figure 7 – Compared to students in traditional education, ALE students tend to…

	ALE	Traditional	Based on…
Be less likely to be on track to graduate on time	36%	66%	Students who have earned the expected number of credits for their grade level and district in order to graduate in four years.
Be one or more grade levels behind	35%	12%	Students that are at least one grade level behind their expected grade level given their age.
Have failed or withdrawn from more courses	4.2 credits	1.5 credits	Mean number of credits students have attempted and not earned.
Drop out of school	11%	2%	High school students that withdrew from school because they dropped out.
Graduate late[1]	68%	35%	High school students who graduated after the year they were expected to graduate or were expected to have graduated and have not yet graduated.
Perform less well on standardized tests	53%	68%	Students that met standards on all standardized tests (Math, Reading, EOC Math 1, and EOC Math 2).
Be less likely to take college-bound coursework[2]	12%	22%	8th through 12th graders who have taken courses that predict college enrollment or who participate in programs that prepare them for college.
Have slightly lower GPAs	2.0	2.6	Mean grade point average (GPA).

1. On time graduation is defined as students who were expected to graduate in 2013 and received a high school diploma, Associate's degree, International Baccalaureate High School Diploma, GED, or completed an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in 2013. Students that are behind are those who were expected to graduate in 2013 and did not graduate and students that were expected to graduate prior to 2013 and have not yet graduated or graduated in 2013.

2. We defined college-bound students as:
   - 8th- and 9th-grade students who completed Algebra 1 by the end of 8th grade
   - 10th- and 11th-grade students who completed Geometry, two Standard or Above Standard level English credits, and one foreign language credit by the end of 10th grade
   - 12th-grade students who completed Algebra 2 and two foreign language credits by the end of 12th grade
   - Students who participated in the International Baccalaureate, College at the High School, Running Start, or Cambridge international programs

Standardized test performance

Washington uses standardized assessments to test student academic progress. These tests include Measurements of Student Progress (MSP), High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE), and End-of-Course (EOC) exams for math and biology (biology EOC required 2015 on). Standards change slightly from year to year, but students generally need to achieve 60 percent to 65 percent on these assessments to be considered meeting state standard. **Figure 8** shows that ALE students are less likely to meet standards on state tests than their non-ALE counterparts. The difference in performance on standardized tests is particularly pronounced for ALE students taking state math tests. However, ALE and non-ALE students perform similarly on state reading tests.

Figure 8: Percent of students meeting standards on standardized tests

Preliminary data based on a limited sample of 2012-2013 school year

Test	ALE	Traditional
Math	44%	62%
Reading	70%	74%
EOC Math 1	26%	55%
EOC Math 2	57%	78%